

15. JUMPING SNAKES

Reference Mr. D. E. Reuben's note in your April 1956 issue, and that of Mr. H. A. N. Medd on p. 195 of Vol. 54, No. 1: the Russell's Viper (*Vipera russelli*) is well known in Ceylon for its jumping capabilities. There is a well-authenticated story of one attacking a pedestrian in Colombo many years ago in this manner, and on two occasions I have had wounded ones try to jump at me after I had shot them, in each case the charge had hit them in the latter half of the body but they were still able to get off the ground to a height of of about a foot. Both snakes were about 2 ft. 6 in. to 3 ft. long and some 2 to 3 in. thick.

HAMBANTOTA,
CEYLON,
January 6, 1958.

A. E. BUTLER

16. RAT-SNAKES 'MATING'

On the 11th of this month whilst returning from the fields after work at about 4.30 p.m. I saw a very interesting sight of two huge dhamans (rat-snakes) courting. During the act they would stand about 4 feet off the ground and sway about like big cobras and occasionally one would bite the other at the base of the head just like a stallion does whilst covering a mare.

They seemed quite undisturbed at the presence of five or six people watching them from a distance of about ten feet, and now and again one of them would try and puff its neck as if mimicking a cobra.

The coolies insisted that they were cobras and begged me to shoot them, whereupon I went up to them and as they tried to make off caught one of them, which was the slower of the two at getting away, just to show the coolies that there was nothing to fear from them as they were harmless. I measured the one I had caught, with some difficulty, as it had wound considerably round my arm and it measured nearly 10 ft. The other, I think, was about the same length.

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K. R. SETHNA